May 25, 2014

John 14:15-21

Never Alone

Rev. Kerry Smith

Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

New Revised Standard Version

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

 Have you ever seen the Holy Spirit? In the Bible we have descriptions of tongues of fire (Acts 2) or a wind (John 3) and in the scripture passage we just read Jesus says the Holy Spirit looks like an Advocate. The one who stands up for you when you need it; the one who speaks on your behalf; the one who lends you a helping hand, takes your side, and won't leave you while you're down.

 The Holy Spirit as our Advocate reminds me of the story of a student taking a class in Logic. The course and teacher were known for tough exams. The final exam was around the corner, and the professor told the class that each student would be permitted to bring in a single 8 x 11 ½ inch sheet with as much information as they could put on that one sheet for help during the test. On exam day, each student came to class clutching their precious pieces of paper with as much information as possible. Some students had crammed lines and lines of font so tiny onto that single sheet that it seemed barely readable. But one student walked in with a single blank sheet. Right behind that student came a friend who was a senior and who had previously received an A in logic. The student bent down and placed that single, blank sheet of paper on the floor next to the desk. The expert friend stood on the paper.

The professor noticed the extra person in the room and asked what was going on. The student said, “You said we could bring in whatever we could fit on a single piece of paper for help on this test, well, this is my help and my friend can fit on the paper!” The Holy Spirit is like that friend, standing alongside us, supporting us, and guiding us.

The Holy Spirit is also an Advocate that looks a whole lot like Jesus.[[1]](#footnote-1) Jesus says the Holy Spirit will abide with us just as Jesus the Word made flesh abided with us. The Holy Spirit is sent in Jesus' name and reminds us of what Jesus taught. The Holy Spirit shows us Jesus presence and reminds us of Jesus’ promise that we will not be left as orphans.

Have you ever seen the Holy Spirit? You have anytime someone stands up for another, anytime someone acts like Jesus, anytime someone bears the love of Christ to another, we have seen the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit might even look like us when we stand up for others or when we try to be more like Jesus and bear Christ’s love into the world.

 I saw the Holy Spirit this past Sunday when our youth minister, Gary Fox, and our children’s minister, Kristin Mallory, and I were making sure we had everything for the Fellowship Lunch honoring our graduating seniors. We had filled one urn with water and the other with lemonade. I looked in the icemaker for ice, but then I remembered that it was broken and there was no ice there. So, I went back to the kitchen and looked in the freezer, but there was no ice there. I was trying to convince myself that tepid water and lemonade is delicious and no one would mind, when I see Bill and BJ Gavitt walking down the sidewalk to the church with a cooler behind them. Bill came inside and said his freezer just happened to make too much ice, so he thought he would bring it to the church. Really? Thank you Holy Spirit!

Thursday we celebrated Preschool Graduation and there was a family that had visited Greenland Hills on Easter Sunday. I had assumed that they had a church home, and was very surprised to see them in worship here Easter Sunday. At the graduation they told me that they really felt supported and encouraged at Greenland Hills and that they would be back in worship soon. Thank you Holy Spirit!

Friday morning Dennis the Facilities Manager at Dallas Bethlehem Center arrived to pick up 10 round tables for the Grand Reveal and Open House this coming Tuesday. The mayor of Dallas will be coming! The Dallas Bethlehem Center opened in 1946 serving its neighborhood in south Dallas where the median household income is $23,000. It shut its doors in December 2011 due to financial reasons. The neighborhood was devastated because of the ministry that they experienced at the Bethlehem Center. There would be no more childcare, no more gym, no more programs, no more safe place. In January 2012 thieves took the copper from the air-conditioning and as a result the electricity was lost. When the police came to investigate, they discovered the gym still had electricity and the Dallas Police Athletic League was asked if they wanted to use it for youth sports programs. The Dallas Bethlehem Center was closed for only one month!

By 2013 Dallas Bethlehem Center was reorganized and reopened. Now there is a community garden, and new life through community partnerships with an early childhood education program, with a food distribution program, with the Dallas Police Athletic League for youth athletics. Steve Blow wrote an editorial in the Dallas Morning News in December 2013 because when the Center reopened they had to now have a sprinkler system that would cost $100,000, and donations poured in and covered the cost. The people in the neighborhood are empowered. Saturday mornings there is breakfast, tutoring for the children, and the community is tending their community garden. Dallas Bethlehem Center is in zip code 75215 which is the urban zip code undertaken by the North Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church in the zip code project, aimed at eliminating poverty in one urban and one rural zip code. When Dallas Bethlehem Center called Greenland Hills a few weeks ago to borrow the tables, I was so glad that Greenland Hills could support them and walk alongside them in their ministry. Thank you Holy Spirit![[2]](#footnote-2)

Union is a new church start of the United Methodist Church and a new kind of non-profit coffee shop that exists to take care of its neighborhood. Union has worship services Tuesday nights at 8 pm and a naked stage for story-telling Friday nights. Greenland Hills is a covenant church of Union and commits $2000 every year for its ministries. Last week I attended with Greenland Hill-ians Jennifer Barnes and Christina Marshall an event at Union. Different folks shared about how they had experienced God’s love at Union. A law school student talked about how she had experienced God’s love for the first time at Union. Baristas knew not only her order, not only her schedule, but could tell when something was wrong. She experienced the Holy Spirit at Union, the one who stands up for you when you need it; the one who speaks on your behalf; the one who lends you a helping hand, takes your side, and won't leave you while you're down.

Jesus says, Do not fear. I am not leaving you orphaned. In your hearts and spirits you will remember all the words that we have shared together. I am asking the Father to send to you an Advocate, one who will stand with you, guide your steps, support you in all that you do.

We want to believe, we want to trust in God, but we are afraid. I think of the father whose son was sick in Mark 9:24, he cries out to Jesus, “I believe, help my unbelief.” We want the brightness of God’s love. We want the cloud of doubt to go away. May God reach out to us with peace and love so that we may reach out to others in the name of Jesus. If we want to know the presence of the Holy Spirit, then expect it, wait for it, prepare for it, believe in its coming. We will see it because believing is seeing!

Yesterday the most wonderful thing happened. The pool that we visit during the summer opened. I love to swim. When I was five years old we moved into a house with a pool. I would swim every day in the summer, which for Houston was 10 months out of the year. What I loved most about swimming was taking a big breath, going under the water, slowing letting the air go and seeing the bubbles coming from my mouth, and hearing nothing. All of the noise from the world was gone. All of the worry from the world was gone. I could hear nothing but my breathing. As I got older, going under the water was my favorite thing to do.

When I am at the pool now, they have this amazing thing called Adult Swim. When there is ten minutes left to the hour, the lifeguards blow their whistles and all of the kids have to get out of the pool. It is time for just the adults to swim! So, I begin my swimming. I breathe in, dive in, and slowly breathe out. My head goes under the water and the utter and complete chaos of the neighborhood community pool is gone. It is only me and my breath. No demands from children. No demands from work. No demands from friends or family. No deadlines, no meetings, no to do lists. Just slowly release the air and see the bubbles. “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” (John 14:1)

 When I had children, I wanted them to know the peace that I experienced when I had my head under the water. I took my daughter to Emler’s swimming school when she was 3 years old and paid lots of money for her to refuse to jump in the water, be afraid of the water, and eventually through many, many lessons begin to think about putting her head under the water. After many weeks and months, she began to actually enjoy swimming. She would put her head under the water and I would smile. Just breathe and slowly release the air. In and out.

When I had my son I knew that he would love water too. And why wouldn’t he? I loved water, my daughter finally loved water, he would love water too. And he did, sort of. But then after his fourth round of ear tubes, the ENT suggested taking a break from the swimming lessons. No year-round swimming? But how would he get over the fear? How would he learn to love swimming like I did? Like his sister did? How would he be able to just breathe? In and out? But then I saw him play in the water. He doesn’t put his head under, but he has fun. He loves to be in an inner tube on top of the water, he loves to throw the football while standing in the water. He loves to shoot water guns. He loves to be in the water. Will he ever be able to find the meaning that I do when he puts his head under the water and the world quiets?

 The Holy Spirit works differently in him than the Holy Spirit works in me. I love being in the water and the peace, comfort and strength that I find in the water. My son loves being in the water and the joy that he finds there. I celebrate that God is in both of our experiences.

 When we feel vulnerable this week, may we remember Jesus’ promise that we will not be left as orphans. Jesus will come to us. We are not alone. We are God’s beloved and we are surrounded by those in whom the Spirit has made a home. We are not orphans. We have not been forgotten. God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

1. http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1573 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.dallasbethlehemcenter.org [↑](#footnote-ref-2)